

Ezra 1 – Thursday, July 6th, 2017

- So tonight we start in the new book of Ezra in our trek through the Bible book-by-book, chapter-by-chapter and verse-by-verse.
- We started in Genesis chapter one almost ten years ago on October 4th, 2007 so we're on track to finish the Bible in 50-years.
- Actually, we'll probably get through the Old Testament a little faster by virtue of how the chapters are shorter for the most part.

- By way of introduction, I think this would be a good time to put the book of Ezra into the context of the Old Testament scripture.

- For those interested in these kinds of things, you'll be happy to know the Old Testament can be organized into four sections.

#1. The Pentateuch - 5 books - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

#2. Historical Books - 12 books - Joshua, Judges, Ruth, First Samuel, Second Samuel, First Kings, Second Kings, First Chronicles, Second Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther.

#3. Poetic books - 5 books - Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon

#4. Prophetic books - 17 books - Major Prophets - Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel

- Minor Prophets - Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

- As we're about to see, the book of Ezra continues with the narrative of Israel's history where the end of 2nd Chronicles left off.

- It's been 70-years between the end of 2nd Chronicles and the beginning of the book of Ezra which fulfilled Jeremiah's prophecy.

- Specifically, that of the disobedience on the part of the Israelites concerning the land enjoying her Sabbath rest every 7th year.

2 Chronicles 36:20-23 - 20 And those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, 21 to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years. 22 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, 23 Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up!

- It's important to note that the book of 2 Chronicles actually ends with an introduction to the next book, which is the book of Ezra.

- As we'll see in the first chapter, Cyrus will make a decree permitting Ezra and the Babylonian captives to return to Jerusalem.

- As such, they will rebuild the temple in the year 538 B.C., which will be a fulfillment of the many prophecies that foretold this.

Jeremiah 25:8–11 (NKJV) — 8 "Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Because you have not heard My words, 9 behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,' says the LORD, 'and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, against its inhabitants, and against these nations all around, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, a hissing, and perpetual desolations. 10 Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. 11 And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.'

Jeremiah 29:10–14 (NKJV) — 10 For thus says the LORD: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. 11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. 12 Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 13 And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive.

1 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, 2 Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah.

- The beginning of the chapter is very interesting for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that Cyrus was king of Persia.

- In other words, this gentile king is stirred up by the God of Israel to fulfill a prophecy spoken of him prior, by the prophet Isaiah.

- What makes it so interesting is that the prophecy in Isaiah, which mentions Cyrus by name, was 150 years before he was born.

Isaiah 44:28–45:4 (NKJV) — 28 Who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, And he shall perform all My pleasure, Saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," And to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid." ' 1 "Thus says the LORD to His anointed, To Cyrus, whose right hand I have held— To subdue nations before him And loose the armor of kings, To open before him the double doors, So that the gates will not be shut: 2 'I will go before you And make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of bronze And cut the bars of iron. 3 I will give you the treasures of darkness And hidden riches of secret places, That you may know that I, the LORD, Who call you by your name, Am the God of Israel. 4 For Jacob My servant's sake, And Israel My elect, I have even called you by your name; I have named you, though you have not known Me.'

- The question becomes one of whether or not Cyrus knowing this prophecy about him was instrumental in his being stirred up.
- Some suggest that it's quite possible that the Prophet Daniel may have showed Cyrus the prophecies of Jeremiah and Isaiah.

Adam Clarke of this wrote, "Josephus accounts for his partiality to the Jews from this circumstance; that he was shown the places in Isaiah the prophet where he is mentioned by name, and his exploits and conquests foretold."

3 Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem. 4 And whoever is left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides the freewill offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.

- Here we're told that Cyrus issues a decree for God's people to return to Jerusalem to build the house of the Lord God of Israel.
- It's interesting to note that God didn't call all of them to go back to Jerusalem and those who stayed supported them financially.
- Actually, there's a detailed reference to only a remnant returning to Jerusalem mentioned in Isaiah by way of another prophecy.

Isaiah 10:22 (NKJV) — 22 For though your people, O Israel, be as the sand of the sea, A remnant of them will return; The destruction decreed shall overflow with righteousness.

- Before we move on to verse five, there's something here that I would like to point out as it relates to those whom God will call.
- To me this speaks to how we don't have to coerce people to do what God hasn't called them to do using guilt and manipulation.
- I think we do err greatly especially as leaders when we try to convince people to serve in an area that God never called them to.

5 Then the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, with all whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem. 6 And all those who were around them encouraged them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with precious things, besides all that was willingly offered.

- Notice how that in verse five, it was only those "whose spirits God had moved," that arose by faith to return back to Jerusalem.
- Notice also how in verse six, those who did not return encouraged those who did with support and it was of their own volition.
- Here again, this speaks to how all of us have different callings and gifting's though different parts of the same body of believers.

Romans 12:3–8 - 3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. 4 For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. 6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; 7 or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; 8 he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

1 Corinthians 12:14-26 NIV (14) Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. (15) If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. (16) And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. (17) If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? (18) But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. (19) If they were all one part, where would the body be? (20) As it is, there are many parts, but one body. (21) The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" (22) On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, (23) and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, (24) while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, (25) so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. (26) If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

Perhaps you'll indulge me as I share an illustration that I hope will help with the application, let's say that my ten-year-old daughter Sabia notices that I need a glass of water and proceeds to bring one to me at the pulpit. Because her shoes had become untied, she trips and falls just as she's about to give it to me. Upon seeing this seven people rush to the front of the sanctuary and begin using their gifts. The one with the gift of prophecy will say something like, "Sabia, in the future, be prudent and foresee the danger of not having your shoes tied." The one with the gift of serving doesn't say anything they just grab some towels and get busy cleaning up the mess. The one with the gift of teaching will say something like; "Sabia, perhaps it would be wiser for you to purchase shoes that don't have shoelaces." The one with the gift of encouragement will say something like; 'Sabia, don't be discouraged, we all stumble and fall, you be encouraged sweetheart.' The one with the gift of giving says; "Sabia, here take this fifty dollars and go buy yourself some new Velcro shoes." The one with the gift of leading is the one who everyone looks to take the lead, and will say something like; "Sabia, just bring a bottle of water that has a lid on it instead." The one with the gift of mercy will give Sabia a huge hug and say something like; "Oh it's okay, I know how you feel, don't be embarrassed, nobody's mad at you, I'm here for you."

7 King Cyrus also brought out the articles of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and put in the temple of his gods; 8 and Cyrus king of Persia brought them out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. 9 This is the number of them: thirty gold platters, one thousand silver platters, twenty-nine knives, 10 thirty gold basins, four hundred and ten silver basins of a similar kind, and one thousand other articles. 11 All the articles of gold and silver were five thousand four hundred. All these Sheshbazzar took with the captives who were brought from Babylon to Jerusalem.

- So the chapter ends with the specificity of articles and treasures King Cyrus brought out for them to take back to Jerusalem.
- It's important to understand that had God not moved on his heart and called him by name, this would have never happened.
- I can't think of a better way to end the chapter and tonight's Bible study with this display of God's power over man's affairs.